District Review Report

School District No. 49 (Central Coast)

April 4 - 7, 2004

Submitted to the Minister of Education

By District Review Team Chair
Harry Janzen, Superintendent, School District No. 70 (Alberni)

District Review Report

2003/2004

District Name:	Central Coast
District Number:	49
Superintendent:	Jerry Smit
Date of Visit:	April 4-7, 2004
Team Chair:	Harry Janzen, Superintendent, SD 70 (Alberni)
Team Members:	Ann Garside, Education Officer, Accountability, Ministry of Education Shari Green, Parent, SD 57 (Prince George) Pat Lang, Principal, SD 60 (Peace River North) Angela Magon, Teacher, SD 85 (Vancouver Island North) Heather Morin, Education Officer, Aboriginal Education Enhancements Branch, Ministry of Education

Context

School District No. 49 (Central Coast) is a small and geographically isolated district. It serves 326 students in 5 schools, 2 of which are accessible only by plane or boat. The District has experienced significant declining enrolment over the past four years and this trend is predicted to continue. Declining enrolment poses significant financial challenges to the District. The District is consulting fully with the community in search of solutions.

There are three distinct First Nations in the District: the Oweekeno, the Nu'xalk, and the Heiltsuk, which comprise 56% of the student population. It is expected that the Aboriginal student population will continue to increase relative to non-Aboriginal students.

The District employs 31.6 FTE educators and 26.1 FTE support staff. The superintendent of schools also serves as the secretary-treasurer, special education director and coordinator of Aboriginal education. The school board has five trustees, four of whom are elected by area and one at large. Two principals serve the five schools in the District.

Summary of Process

The purposes of the District Review are to:

- Review school district and school achievement data;
- Review the school district accountability contract and school plans to improve student achievement;
- Determine the capacity of the school district to support schools in improving student achievement;

- Make recommendations to the school district and to the Minister about improving student achievement; and
- Identify promising practices that might assist other school districts in their plans to improve student achievement.

The School District Review Team, in addressing the above purposes reviewed the following:

- Processes whereby the goals, objectives and targets set out in the District plan and school plans were determined;
- Progress of the school district and schools with respect to improvement targets;
- School district strategies used to support the District and school plans; and
- Coherence between the District plan and school plans.

The School District Review Team met with the Superintendent and three trustees to review elements of the District plan for improving student achievement.

The Team visited all five schools in the District: Oweekeno Elementary School, Shearwater Elementary School, Bella Coola Elementary School, Nusatsum Elementary School and Sir Alexander Mackenzie Secondary School. The purpose of the school meetings was to review, with School Planning Councils, the elements of school plans for improving student achievement.

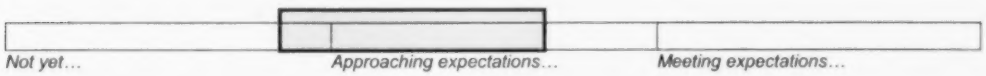
The Team also met with the Nu'xalk Aboriginal Education Council, the Oweekeno Aboriginal Education Council, and a small group of parents from the schools in the Bella Coola Valley.

The Team provided a de-briefing to the Superintendent, the trustees, principals and parents at the conclusion of its review.

The District Review Team appreciated the warm hospitality of the District and the willingness of all to provide information and respond to questions.

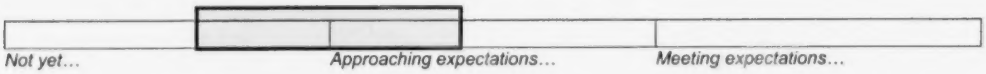
Observations in Key Areas - Focus on Student Achievement

1. *Goals:*
   Improving districts and schools have a strong instructional focus. This focus is made visible in relevant goals for improving achievement for all students.



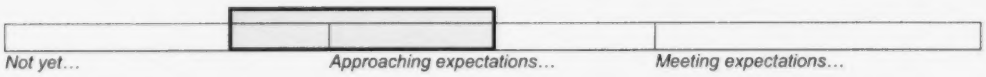
- Goals are generally related to student achievement.
- Each district goal should be more concise, focusing on one area of student achievement, with targets identified elsewhere.
- Aboriginal goals should be stated separately and focus on continuous successful student achievement and not focus on the gap.
- The District and some schools have too many goals.

2. *Rationale:*
Improving districts and schools have a thorough and connected set of reasons, **based on evidence**, for the selection of their student achievement goals.



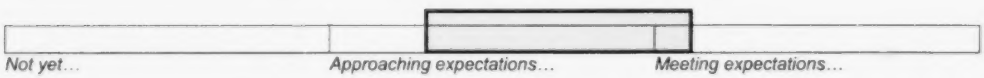
- Some rationale of school goals is based on past experience and although not data-driven, is valid.
- Some rationale of the District and school goals is based on limited evidence.
- Selection of some school goals is based on previous accreditation goals and not on current evidence.

3. *Data:*
Improving districts and schools are actively considering at least three sources of evidence including classroom, school, district and provincial data. The analysis of this evidence informs the selection of the district goals and is used to monitor progress.



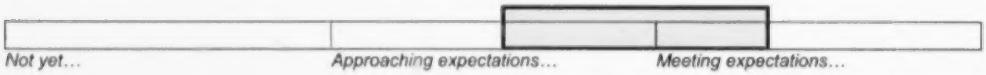
- School level data informs the District's accountability contract.
- The District and schools recognize that three sources of data are important to student achievement analysis, however the reliance on FSA data is too great for the small size of the district.
- Schools use diagnostic standardized tests inappropriately to track student achievement.
- Little use is made of performance standards based district assessment tools for monitoring student achievement.
- Reporting in percentages conveys little information about student achievement due to small numbers.

4. *Strategies:*
Improving districts and schools have well-organized, focused improvement plans in place. The strategies selected to achieve the goals are an intelligent blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking.



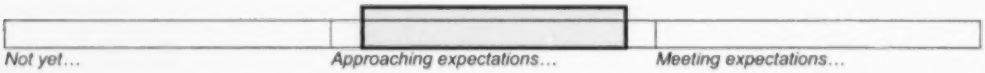
- There is a wide variety of strategies focused on literacy.
- Research based strategies should be more directly focused on specific objectives.
- Strategies in some schools are a listing of activities rather than specific plans relating to instructional improvement.
- District-wide goals require district-wide strategies, and long-term staff development.
- Specific strategies targeting Aboriginal achievement are not clearly stated.

5. *Structures:*
Improving districts and schools have aligned structures – resources, time, organizations – to get the results they want. This includes, but is not limited to, effectively differentiating resources in the areas of highest need for improvement.



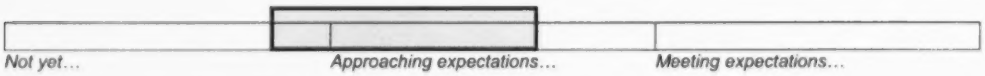
- Schools show great ingenuity and creativity in realigning resources, time, and organization.
- Structured time is given to literacy at all schools.
- Additional district personnel is required to help the schools develop, implement, and monitor their school improvement plans.
- The District should seek to establish collaborative relationships with other districts.

6. *Results:*
Improving districts and schools get improved results – at the classroom, school and district levels.



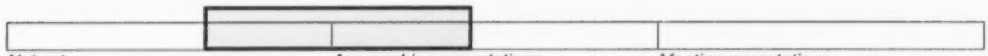
- Schools are generally monitoring results, and most schools are beginning to look for baselines and trends.
- The District needs to set direction with regard to consistent data collection.
- Results need to be reported by numbers instead of percentages due the small size of the District.
- Continuous monitoring of results should lead to adjustments in instructional strategies rather than adjustments to targets or goals.

7. *Communication:*
Improving districts and schools are involved in continuous dialogue about student achievement and make public their improvement goals and the progress being made in specific areas of focus.



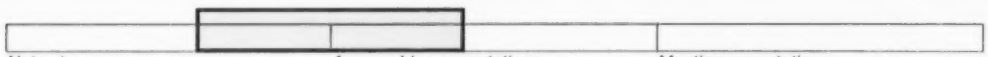
- While schools communicate with parents frequently in a variety of ways, knowledge of student achievement goals and progress being made is limited.
- Communication plans do not appear to involve students.
- Communication with Aboriginal parents in relation to goal development is not evident.

8. *Teamwork – District and School Coherence*:
Improving districts and schools have an interactive strategy for connecting school and district goals. School uniqueness and school-district directions are both valued.



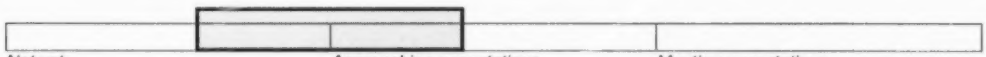
- District Accountability Initiative grants help to support school plans.
- The District plan does not clearly indicate how the District will help inform and guide the schools in their efforts to improve student achievement.
- Opportunities exist to improve inter-school connections.

9. *Teamwork – District and Parent Involvement*:
Improving districts and schools work as a team with parents, including specific groups of parents, to improve student achievement.



- Some communication is occurring with Aboriginal parents; different and unique strategies need to be developed between the District and Aboriginal communities.
- A limited number of parent groups have knowledge or comprehension of district goals and improvement plans for achievement. Most parent groups have been informed of goals, but some did not appear to be part of the goal design process.
- Schools are in different stages of development in their SPCs and further training is required.

10. *Leadership / Teamwork:*
Leaders in improving districts and schools have a clear vision for, and commitment, to improving achievement for all students. Leadership at all levels, in all roles, is encouraged and systematically developed in a collaborative learning community with a focus on improving student achievement.



- Good collaboration exists within schools.
- Greater collaboration between schools would be beneficial.
- Greater collaboration between outlying schools and the District would be beneficial.

Strengths

Team observations of particular strengths related to student achievement at specific schools.

- The Team found caring, committed and capable people throughout the District.
- The District makes a financial commitment to support innovative practices that support student achievement.
- Collaboration within schools is evident.
- A variety of programs are offered (e.g. Band).
- Teachers, parents and the community organize and support frequent out-of-district field trips for students.
- An isolated K – 10 rural school models an effective open area classroom concept.
- A mentorship program exists for beginning teachers.

Promising Practices

District or school practices that could be helpful to other districts with a similar focus.

- Daily Read/Write/Edit program in Grades 4 - 12.
- 'Run across Canada' program that integrates Physical Fitness and Social Studies for rural students.
- The District Alternate Program that develops career path focused educational plans for all students.

Recommendations

Team recommendations for strengthening school and district focus on student achievement and for improving results.

- Develop a standardized and more simplified format (template) for describing District and school plans for improving student achievement.
- In collaboration with Aboriginal communities, create specific goals and strategies within the Accountability Contract for the improved achievement of Aboriginal students.
- Develop common district-wide strategies for supporting and monitoring goals for improving student achievement in literacy and numeracy and support this with appropriate expertise.
- Provide a greater emphasis on improving the understanding and practice of assessment **for** learning and the use of performance standards.
- Develop networks outside the district to access best practices from other jurisdictions.